

**Opening Statement of the Honorable Lee Terry
Subcommittee on Commerce, Manufacturing, and Trade
Hearing on “Takata Airbag Ruptures and Recalls”
December 3, 2014**

(As Prepared for Delivery)

Safety recalls are often marked by tragedy. But they are even more troubling when the very equipment being recalled is intended to save lives.

This morning we will begin piecing together the history of a safety defect that became known only by fits and starts, and seemingly has several potential causes.

The first known rupture occurred in 2004 in Alabama. Three more ruptures in 2007 led Takata to identify a bad stamp press at a manufacturing facility in Moses Lake, Washington.

In 2008, Honda recalled 3,940 cars in the U.S. However, two more airbags ruptured in May and June 2009, one of which killed the driver.

At that point, it appears that Takata believed the airbag inflators were being improperly exposed to moisture during the production process. However, around that same time, Takata confirmed that a stamp press was to blame for at-risk airbags.

In early 2011, uncertainty about the cause of the continuing ruptures led to another recall. And previous recalls were expanded in late 2012 upon the discovery that Takata’s production records were in disarray.

NHTSA, Takata and car manufacturers all indicate that the vehicles with faulty airbags tied to manufacturing or storage issues have been recalled.

And yet several more ruptures subsequently occurred in southern states. This led manufacturers and NHTSA to believe that prolonged exposure to high absolute humidity levels was a major contributing factor.

However, NHTSA recently demanded that manufacturers broaden the current recalls in southern states to the national level. NHTSA believes that recent incidents in California and North Carolina indicate the possibility of ruptures in areas with lower absolute humidity.

I understand Takata disagrees with NHTSA’s assessment and I look forward to learning more about that.

So there are several questions to address –

For example, are current testing methods adequate?

How much testing is enough to determine a cause and how quickly is it being carried out?

What is the appropriate level of coordination between NHTSA, auto-makers and their part suppliers?

What metric should be used to determine whether a recall is necessary?

There are also questions about the supply of replacement parts and whether those replacement parts are truly safer than the parts being recalled.

Our highway safety depends on the vigilance of manufacturers as well as NHTSA. Sometimes the regulator is in the best position to find the defect and sometimes it's the manufacturer.

The time has come to bring the facts together and make sure the unsafe airbag inflators are off the market, consumers can get their faulty parts replaced, and future recalls are handled better.

The safety of America's drivers depends on our collective success on those fronts.

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